



Newsletter 1
March 2005

Miami Circle Study

Message from the Superintendent

Dear Friends of the Miami Circle:

The National Park Service (NPS) is undertaking a planning study in Florida to determine whether the Miami Circle archeological site on the Miami waterfront is qualified to be included in the national park system. On October 3, 2003, Congress directed the National Park Service to study the site's significance, suitability, and feasibility for possible inclusion in the national park system as part of Biscayne National Park. This law, Public Law (PL) 108-93, requires that analysis and recommendations be made about the following three questions:

- Are there any areas in or surrounding the Miami Circle that also should be added to Biscayne National Park?
- Would additional staff, facilities, or other resources be needed to administer the Miami Circle as a unit of the national park?
- Would including the Miami Circle in Biscayne National Park cause any effect on the local area?

The National Park Service is working closely with federal, state, county, and municipal entities, American Indian tribes, and the general public. We also will work with certain parties and groups with an interest in the Miami Circle to identify common goals. Developing collaborative partnerships can offer creative and efficient ways to achieve the mandates of Congress.

Your participation in this effort is important. After you read this newsletter, please use the enclosed response card to share your thoughts about the Miami Circle. When your name is on our mailing list, we will keep you informed about public meetings and send you future newsletters, and we will notify you when a draft plan is available for review. Information also will be available on our Web site at planning.nps.gov/plans.cfm.

If you have comments or questions at any point during the planning process, please feel free to contact Terri Urbanowski, Project Manager, by e-mail at Terri_Urbanowski@nps.gov, by telephone at 303-969-2277, or by U.S. Mail at the following address:

National Park Service
Miami Circle Study / Terri Urbanowski
P.O. Box 25287
Denver, CO 80225-0287

We appreciate your interest in the Miami Circle, and we look forward to working with you.

Sincerely,

Mary Collier, Acting Superintendent
Biscayne National Park

Background

Description

The Miami Circle archeological site sits on a 2.2-acre parcel on Brickell Point on the southern bank of the Miami River, where the river flows into Biscayne Bay. This area, one of modern Miami's most prominent locations, has been an important center for human activity from prehistoric times to the present.

Six 2-story and 3-story apartment buildings were constructed on the site in 1950, and in 1998 a developer bought the property for the purpose of adding a new high-rise apartment building. After the existing buildings were demolished, a required archeological survey revealed significant archeological materials, including a circular series of holes about 38 feet in diameter in the limestone bedrock. This became known as the Miami Circle.

The archeological discovery aroused the interest of the general public and the archeological community. A movement began to protect the site, and citizens, conservation groups, and political leaders worked together to raise funds to buy the property. With funds primarily from the state, the county, and a loan from the Trust for Public Land, the state of Florida purchased the land in November 1999.

In response to public sentiment and in recognition of the potential of the site's archeological and historical significance, PL 108-93 was enacted to study different possible management options, including the possibility of making the Miami Circle a part of Biscayne National Park.

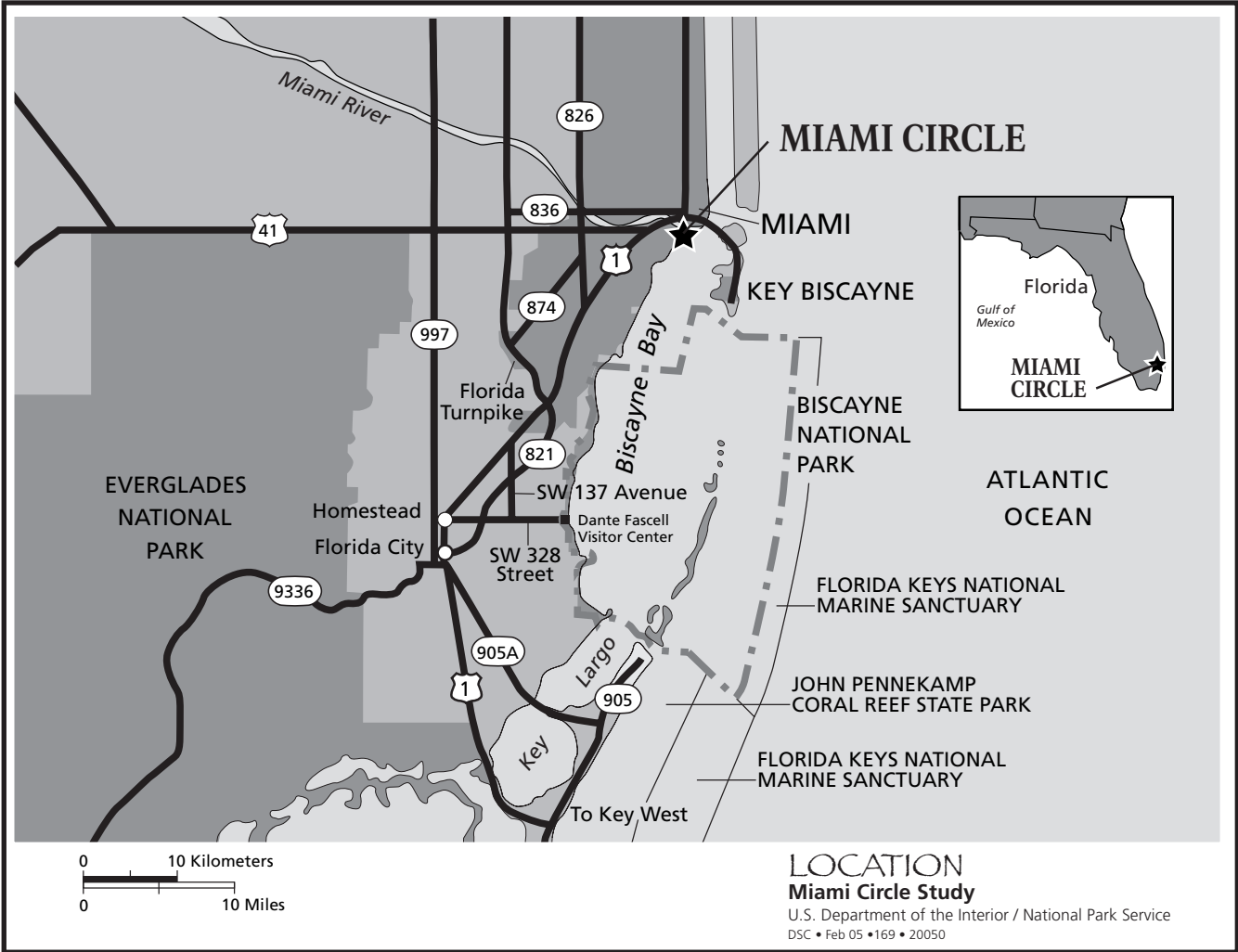


The Miami Circle during archeological excavation showing its proximity to the Miami River

Prehistoric and Historic Contexts

The Miami Circle, also known as the Brickell Point Site, was listed in the National Register of Historic Places on February 5, 2002. It is significant for prehistoric archeology because it has yielded, or may be likely to yield, information of cultural importance. The site is associated with the Tequesta people, one of the first indigenous North American groups encountered by Spanish explorer Juan Ponce de Leon in 1513. The Tequesta are significant because of their cultural persistence into the 18th century following European contact in the 16th century, as well as for their association with and cultural adaptation to the unique environment of the Everglades and coastal Florida.

The site dates to the early occupation of the point of land at the confluence of the Miami River and Biscayne Bay. Excavations from 1998–2000 indicate the site may preserve evidence of complex and intentionally planned architecture, with posthole and basin features that are carved into the local limestone bedrock. This includes the Miami Circle feature, which is an 11.5-meter (38-foot) circular footprint that may be a prehistoric structure. Other significant aspects of the site are artifacts representing exchange with neighboring groups. Pumice and chipped stone materials indicate a relationship with other Tequesta sites, which has helped in understanding patterns of redistributive exchange in southern Florida. Evidence from studies of plant and animal remains offer the potential to better understand the early occupation and exploitation of the Atlantic Coastal Ridge adjacent to the Everglades.



Miami Circle aerial view during archeological excavation



The Miami Circle site during archeological excavation

The National Park Service hosted an open house in October 2004 at the Biscayne Bay Sheraton Hotel, adjacent to the Miami Circle. We heard from people who attended the open house and received emails on ideas about the future management of the site.

The comments summarized below, including some direct quotes, are the ideas we've heard so far about the future management of the Miami Circle. Your thoughts focused on how visitor access should be provided to the site, what facilities should be provided for visitors, what stories should be told about the site, what the visions might be for the site's future, and how to balance visitor use and resource protection.



The Brickell Bridge over the Miami River viewed from the Miami Circle

Access to the Site/Context

- “It’s important the site be seen as it is first-hand, not merely in photographs and reproductions.”
- Provide for different types of visitors seeking education, recreation, and/or spiritual pursuits
- Protect the circle but have and encourage visitor access
- Provide access via the Miami River Greenway and a boat shuttle
- Make access visitor-friendly
- Provide access to elevated viewing



A riverwalk along the Miami River at the Miami Circle might be one means of access to the site

Facilities Appropriate for the Site

- “Less is More.”
- Provide benches, chickees, a dock, a museum, a river-walk, open space, restrooms, and wayside exhibits
- Construct a structure to cover and preserve the circle
- Exhibit artifacts on-site
- Provide visitor-friendly facilities
- Blend facilities with the archeological site’s surrounding vegetation
- Use the public right-of-way beneath the bridge for visitor services

What We’ve Heard So Far

Stories That Might be Told to Visitors

- “Every effort should be made to synthesize data already collected and get the info out to the public.”
- The site’s human occupation at the confluence of the Miami River and Biscayne Bay
- The levels and types of cultural development and adaptation characteristic of the different time periods of occupation
- A range of scholarly interpretation, such as links to the Olmec
- Interpretation of the archeometry of the site and its alignment with the Winter Solstice and Spring Equinox
- The American Indians ties to the Miami Circle
- The site’s importance as an inland gateway because of its water-land position
- How sea levels have changed over time
- How geologically the Miami River and Biscayne Bay came to be formed



Archeological orientation at the Miami Circle

Ways to Tell the Stories

- “There should be an exact cast (concrete) model of the circle and stones overlaying the surface of the original.”
- Construct wayside interpretive displays
- Prepare indoor exhibits
- Conduct ranger-led interpretive walks
- Demonstrate an archeological dig to show how archeological research is done through scientific excavation
- Tell a Tequesta Indian story of the Miami River-Biscayne Bay area
- Exhibit a portion of the excavated artifacts and specimens on-site in a small museum
- Establish a proactive program of research and education that should help protect and interpret the site, building up a concerned constituency

Visions for the Site

- “It’s a spiritual landmark.”
- An educational center for visitors, using pre-history and history as important contexts
- A recreation site
- A ritual or story place



The Miami Circle site viewed from Brickell Bridge at the confluence of the Miami River and Biscayne Bay

Visitor Use and Resource Protection

- “Protect the Circle but have and encourage visitor access.”
- Achieve visitor education, through the proper curation, display, storage, and research on-site or nearby in an existing museum, of the artifacts and specimens that have been recovered
- Restore the scrubs, trees, and vegetative ground cover to the way the area might have looked during the prehistoric heyday of the occupation of the Miami Circle site
- Mow and preserve the current vegetative groundcover as pleasant open space for walking
- Manage the site for minimal wear and tear from both the human and physical environments
- Cover the Miami Circle site with Plexiglas but still allow people to see it up close
- Place an exact cast of some durable but easily removed material over the Miami Circle’s postholes in the bedrock limestone
- Establish a satellite office of Biscayne National Park at or near the site for law enforcement and site interpretation



October 2004 Open House

Partnering

- “Keep the connection of the community to the site.”
- Partner with the First Presbyterian Church to rent its back half as a visitor center with restrooms, interpretive exhibits, and orientation information to the site, which would in turn preserve the Flagler Chapel as well as the Miami Circle
- Use the existing greenway on the bay side of the church for Miami Circle access by land past the Sheraton Biscayne Bay Hotel around to the Miami River and to the Miami Circle
- Encourage a tour boat concession to launch from the church’s bayfront for sightseeing to the circle via the river and to such a place as Boca Chita Key in Biscayne National Park



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Next Steps

Step	Planning Activity	Your Involvement Opportunity
1	Initiate Project Identify the project scope and issues. Seek the public input needed for planning.	Attend public open houses Response to newsletter – Spring 2005
2	Determination of Significance, Suitability, and Feasibility Does the site have the quality, integrity, uniqueness, and managability to become a part of the national park system?	Spring 2005
3	Development of Future Management Options The planning team explores options for what the site’s future could be.	Summer 2005
4	Study Document to Public The study describes the management options and analyzes the impacts of each in an environmental assessment.	Review the study and send in your comments on the draft plan – Winter 2006
5	Recommendations Sent to Congress The study document, a summary of public comments, and a recommendation from the Park Service are sent to Congress.	Summer 2006



Plummets, excavated at the Miami Circle, were used for fishing tackle or body pendants.



Sea turtles were a subsistence source for the people who occupied the Miami Circle.



Planning will be important to the future of the Miami Circle site.



The Miami River has long been an important waterway prehistorically and historically.

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